

Research Brief

Assessment for Closing the Achievement Gap

Question: How can you decrease the achievement gap through the use of assessments?

Summary of Findings: In the United States, because of our focus on accountability, educators are used to thinking of summative assessments. There are none of these assessments that will help individual students close the achievement gap (or increase their achievement). In fact, they are generally good for assessing a school's program and have little validity in evaluating individual students. Only good teaching will improve achievement for students. Educators in other countries, however, are very familiar with an approach to teaching that makes extensive use of formative assessments to help teachers guide and plan instruction. It is called *Assessment for Learning*.

Assessment for learning is not the same as *assessment of learning*. *Assessment of learning* is assessment for accountability purposes, to determine a student's level of performance on a specific task or at the conclusion of a unit of teaching and learning. The information gained from this kind of assessment is often used in reporting. *Assessment for learning*, on the other hand, acknowledges that assessment should occur as a regular part of teaching and learning and that the information gained from assessment activities can be used to shape the teaching and learning process.

Scientific evidence (Black & Wiliam – “Inside the Black Box” – see online resources below) shows that formative assessment is an essential component of raising achievement.

Beyond the Black Box reports, “The research indicates that improving learning through assessment depends on five, deceptively simple factors:

- the provision of effective feedback to pupils;
- the active involvement of pupils in their own learning;
- adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment;
- a recognition of the profound influence assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of pupils, both of which are crucial influences on learning;
- the need for pupils to be able to assess themselves and understand how to improve.”

Assessment for learning involves:

- the sharing of learning intentions/objectives and success criteria with pupils,
- giving oral and written feedback to pupils based on these intentions/objectives, with the feedback relating directly to their learning in a way that they can understand and act upon
- the use of questioning to help pupils express and discuss their ideas and their

- understanding
- the nurturing of pupils as independent learners through the development of self assessment and peer assessment.

Online Resources:

Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment

By Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam

Firm evidence shows that formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work and that its development can raise standards of achievement, Mr. Black and Mr. Wiliam point out. Indeed, they know of no other way of raising standards for which such a strong *prima facie* case can be made.

Phi Delta Kappan, Oct. 1998

<http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kbla9810.htm>

Assessment Crisis: The Absence Of Assessment *FOR* Learning

Richard J. Stiggins

If we wish to maximize student achievement in the U.S., we must pay far greater attention to the improvement of classroom assessment, Mr. Stiggins warns. Both assessment of learning and assessment for learning are essential. But one is currently in place, and the other is not.

Phi Delta Kappan, v83 n10 p758-65 Jun 2002

<http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0206sti.htm>

The Association for Achievement and Improvement through Assessment

Extensive list of links and resources. The aim of the Association is to promote pupil achievement through the processes of effective assessment, recording and reporting.

<http://www.aaia.org.uk/index.htm>

The Assessment Online Toolkit!

The Assessment Online Toolkit has been developed to support the Scottish national Assessment is for Learning (AifL) programme. The toolkit is aimed primarily at Scottish classroom teachers and school managers, but will also be of interest to local authorities, researchers, trainee teachers, parents and pupils. There are three main concept areas: Assessment *FOR* Learning - supporting classroom learning and teaching; Assessment *AS* Learning - learning how to learn; Assessment *OF* Learning - gathering and interpreting the evidence.

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/index.asp>

Assessment For Learning Guide & Publications

Extensive list of downloadable resources

<http://www.teaching-resource.co.uk/teachers/afl.htm>

Assessment for Learning

“Assessment for Learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.” (Assessment Reform Group, 2002) From the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

(QCA). QCA is a non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). QCA has a pivotal role in helping the UK become the most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. Extensive resource.

<http://www.qca.org.uk/7659.html>

Assessment for Learning: Improving learning and raising standards

Evidence indicates that effective assessment as part of on-going teaching and learning, with the active involvement of pupils, is a powerful means of improving learning and raising standards.

Assessment for learning contrasts with assessment of learning, which involves the summarizing of pupils' progress at particular points in time for reporting, monitoring and the evaluation of standards and progress.

<http://www.bgfl.org/services/assess/a4learn.htm>

Assessment for learning - Whole-school training materials

This assessment for learning (AfL) training has been developed as part of the Strategy's support for whole-school improvement. The AfL units are generic. They are designed to support whole-school training and lead to more subject-focused development work in individual departments. The units are to be used selectively according to a school's context and need.

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/keystage3/respub/>

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Submitted By: Mike Muir, Maine Center for Meaningful Engaged Learning

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